

***Flora Tasmaniae: Tasmanian  
Naturalists and Imperial Botany, 1829-1860***

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the practices of botanical collectors in nineteenth-century Van Diemen's Land, their involvement in the *Flora Tasmaniae* and their contribution to broader scientific debates. When Joseph Hooker wrote his introductory essay on the Australian flora for *Flora Tasmaniae* in 1859, it was the first published case study supporting Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. Much of Hooker's evidence for his essay was based on plant material collected by self-trained resident naturalists of Van Diemen's Land, including Robert Lawrence, Ronald Gunn and William Archer. In recent years Darwin, Hooker and their contemporaries have been thoroughly examined, but as yet there has been little concentration upon the colonial collectors who contributed to their research.

Instead of a centre-periphery study, this thesis provides a periphery-centre focus, exploring the role of the colonial naturalists, their contribution to the development of scientific knowledge, and the realities of operating as naturalists in the Antipodes. This thesis argues that resident colonial collectors in Van Diemen's Land made a significant contribution to botanical science during a time of taxonomic and classificatory flux.

By using correspondence, journals, plant specimens and collecting notes this thesis examines one facet of a larger imperial movement. Analysis of these sources demonstrates the nuances of the colonial scientific experience, how knowledge was gained, how contacts and friendships were made and sustained, and what sort of work self-trained enthusiasts undertook. Numerous men and women contributed to a broad discussion on the native flora and fauna, including

landed gentlemen, medical men, public servants and convicted criminals. As the *Flora* grew from their efforts, colonists questioned the source of power in the scientific world. This thesis discusses these changing tensions, and how those with a deeper local understanding balanced their colonial knowledge with the views of those in the metropole.

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